

INTERNATIONAL CITY MANAGERS' ASSOCIATION  
1313 EAST 60TH STREET - CHICAGO 37, ILLINOIS

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## METHODS OF KEEPING CITY EMPLOYEES INFORMED

What is the responsibility of the chief administrator for keeping city employees informed? On what matters should employees be informed? What are the best methods of doing this job?

Rank-and-file employees in both industry and government are receiving greater recognition as human beings. In local government many chief administrators are using various methods of keeping employees informed. In addition to demonstrating appreciation, understanding, and assistance to subordinates, and along with direction and control, such chief administrators also are providing more opportunities for participation by subordinates in deciding how things are to be done. Every chief administrator should be acquainted with all the methods of keeping employees fully informed on matters of interest and concern to them and, equally important, must provide ways for employees to offer suggestions as well as get answers to their questions. The purpose of this report is to review and comment briefly on these methods.

Management Responsibility. Management as represented by the chief administrator and council cannot avoid the responsibility for making decisions on matters affecting employees. Such decisions should not be sidestepped or postponed unduly. But in the process of arriving at decisions, and also to be assured that its decisions will be readily accepted by the employees, management should be willing to supply all the facts and to air differences of points of view, so that misunderstandings, rumors, and falsehoods can be avoided or removed. Management can create a better understanding about matters of concern to employees before misinformation spreads, by building up a plan of education and training designed to generate light instead of heat.

Management cannot afford to say: "We refuse to discuss that matter." The proper attitude should be one of mutual trust between top officials and the employees so that whatever may be bothering the employees can be discussed fully and frankly. Management and employees have much in common. Joint efforts for their common benefit also will redound to the benefit of the citizens.

Management generally must make the first move. An effective first step is to give employees or their representatives the opportunity to find out for themselves how much they know or do not know about administration policies. Another first step is to ask the employee representatives for their opinions on problems affecting the employees before deciding upon a course of action. The final decision, of course, remains with management. If any of the employees belong to a union or other employee group, the way they act as members of such groups depends in part on how they feel they are treated as employees of the city.

Full and frank discussion of all the facts affecting any problem seldom fails to develop common agreement on a solution which all participants will feel a sense of responsibility to support. It is often a rough and rocky road to travel but everytime it is traveled the going becomes easier. Finally, management should devise ways and means of giving every individual an opportunity for self-expression and recognition.

(OVER)



Types of Information. Matters on which employees should be informed may be indicated to some extent by the factors employees value most in their jobs. A recent survey by the General Electric Company of what employees want in their jobs showed nine distinct ingredients: good pay, good working conditions, good bosses, steady work, a chance to get ahead, to be treated with respect, to get the facts about what is going on, to be doing something worthwhile, to have other reasons for liking their job (such as finding it interesting and satisfying). As a result of this survey the company prepared a supervisor's guide which elaborates the nine desired job elements, encourages supervisors to make sure that these nine elements are always present in the employees' jobs, and provides suggestions for removing the various obstacles which could prevent either the individual employee or the company from realizing full value from his job.

Employees should be given the opportunity to know as much about the city's program and his job as is available to the council and the administrator. How much will be of interest, how much will be absorbed, how much retained will be an individual matter but the opportunity should be provided. For example, the clerical staff in a department may want to learn about the operations of other departments in the city. This may result in a better informed and cohesive group and help build up a better morale. Again, an employee may ask: "What is my opportunity for advancement with the city? What are the rules on leaves of absence, vacations, overtime, etc"?

The work of most any employee generally is more interesting if he knows what contribution he is making to the municipal service and how he fits into the organization. The new employee especially wants to become acquainted with the city's services, the purpose of municipal services, and his place in the organization so that he will not think of himself only in terms of his own job but will feel that he "belongs". A municipal employee also should be informed on what is to be done, how he is expected to do his job, and regulations affecting his job. Employees who are kept informed become more interested in their work and cooperate better with each other to get the job done.

A threatened or proposed change of any kind may affect the sense of security of the employee. He may feel that he is being demoted, or he may fear that he may be laid off or transferred to a less desirable job. When such changes are contemplated, management should explain carefully just what is to be done and the reasons. This cooperative approach in what might be construed as an area of management prerogatives will result in employee acceptance where antagonism otherwise might be created. Employees often are more concerned with the manner in which things are done rather than in the actual change. They are entitled to advance notice and also a full statement of reasons.

No information in which employees indicate interest should be concealed from them. An aggressive willingness on the part of management to share information on city finances, services, plans for the future, reasons why certain things cannot be done, etc., shows that management wants to take the employee into its confidence. Employees also ought to have some opportunity to ask questions and discuss situations as well as to receive facts. Because supervisors have contacts with employees in a large city, the department heads and manager can use the supervisor as a channel for two-way discussions. Another channel is representatives of employee groups, especially if representatives are elected by members of the group. These employees are likely to know what the employees want to know better than does management. By informing these leaders and giving them the prestige and responsibility of relaying information to the employees, the city builds up their status in a constructive way.



Some Methods of Informing Employees

How can municipal employees best be kept informed? A variety of devices are available. A city will rarely use all of them, and each method must be carefully adapted to local conditions. These methods include personal contact on the job; in-service training; personnel manuals; employee handbooks; newsletters; employee organizations; employee publications; bulletin boards; contests and suggestion systems; employee meetings; administrative regulations; radio and newspapers; and letters, reports, and movies. Insofar as possible management should anticipate the matters on which employees should be informed. In addition some procedure can be set up for answering individual questions, rumors, and so on. These could be answered through a rumor clinic, a meeting to which employees might be invited, through a newsletter, employees' magazine, or other method. A brief review of various mediums may be useful to chief administrators in reviewing and improving methods of contacting city employees.

Person-to-Person Contact. Perhaps the best method of communicating with anyone is through word of mouth. Too many administrators rely solely on the written word - a letter, personnel manual, orders, and the like, which often become stilted or do not properly convey ideas to others. A chief administrator can hardly visit each city employee, except in the small cities, to tell him about a new policy, a new program, or an altered regulation. He should, however, devote a good share of his time sounding out the city employees to test their understanding of previously adopted city policies and at the same time, to make more personal the superior-subordinate relationships that exist in any organization.

City employees should rightfully look to their immediate supervisor for information and guidance on what they should do, how the work is to be carried out. The bond between the employee and his immediate supervisor ought to be strengthened and not weakened by frequent interjectory orders from those in higher positions. Yet the top administrator should not be so insulated from the city employees so that he has no personal contact with them.

"Get out and talk to them!" is a good rule. But it must be done with discretion, without appearing to snoop and without creating a fear on the part of the employees' superior that his authority is being weakened. The administrator can make test checks on the employees' knowledge of city policies, what the city can and cannot do, and on their general attitude. The person-to-person contact oils the machinery so that the other forms of communication will be more effective.

In-Service Training. Training on the job is a useful tool for informing employees, whether through a correspondence course, through the conference method of training, through a short course sponsored by a state school or national organization, or by some other method. The conference method of training is especially useful because it brings various officials or employees together to learn directly about the problems and work of other agencies in the city government and how their jobs fit into the entire organization. On-the-job training should not be confined to firemen, policemen, meter readers, inspectors, and others, but should also be used at the administrative level.

An important field of in-service training is that of training public contact employees in public relations. One type of training would apply to inspectors, meter readers, visiting nurses, and other employees who contact citizens at their homes or places of business. Another type of training would be given employees who meet citizens who come to the city hall to apply for licenses or pay their utility bills or taxes. Still another type of training would be

(OVER)



given employees receiving complaints over the telephone or in the daily mail. The training of city employees in tact, courtesy, and promptness in handling the public is itself an important task in the field of employee relations.

The job of informing employees on public relations training consists of preparing or securing material useful in answering questions most likely to be asked, keeping employees posted regarding changes in municipal policies, and informing employees on how to handle questions and complaints over the desk. Booklets and films are available, for example, from the telephone company for use in training in telephone contacts. Information also is available on training employees in improving correspondence methods and on relations with the press. Employees also should be informed on what to do with information they receive from the public, what to refer to other employees, and to whom to refer it. Employees can be informed of these matters through lectures, films, demonstrations, supervised practice, and use of the conference method as well as manuals and guides.

In Kansas City, Mo., contact employees met in groups of 15 to 20 for one-hour sessions once a week for seven weeks. At one session high school students in dramatics based a skit on complaints and suggestions received by city officials from citizens. Thus employees saw themselves as the public sees them. At the conclusion of the drama, the employees rated various taxpayer contacts on the basis of interest, information, speech, politeness, appearance, and final effect. At group meetings employees discussed factors that influence public opinion such as different ways of greeting citizens, methods of overcoming prejudice toward the public, and the technique of asking questions.

New employees may well be given brief orientation or indoctrination training. The first step might be a one-hour conference with a personnel department employee who explains personnel policies and employment practices. Other training should include an explanation of how the city government functions, how a single job fits into the over-all picture, and the importance of each employee to the city.

Many cities, especially the larger ones, have "how-to-do-the-job" manuals of various types. San Diego and Kansas City, for example, have prepared small instruction manuals on how to operate city vehicles including suggestions on accident prevention, courtesy, and care of vehicles. In most cities the police department has police duty or police regulation manuals some of which are used in training and others are carried by policemen for reference purposes in carrying out their job.

It is beyond the scope of this report to discuss in detail how employees are trained on the job. Information on training in any municipal field, including the administrative level, may be secured from various organizations or from the Institute for Training in Municipal Administration conducted by the International City Managers' Association.

Personnel Manuals. During recent years many cities have issued special pamphlets containing personnel rules and regulations. These cities include Albert Lea, Minn.; Amarillo and Baytown, Tex.; Cincinnati, Ohio; Westerville, Ohio; Lynwood, Oxnard, Pasadena, and Santa Monica, Calif.; Midland and Saginaw, Mich.; New Orleans, La.; Milwaukee, Wis.; White Plains, N.Y.; and Junction City, Newton, and Wichita, Kans. These rules usually are printed in attractive pamphlet form. Several carry the title "You and Your Job With the City of \_\_\_\_\_" while others are entitled "Personnel Manual", or "Employment Policies of the City of \_\_\_\_\_", and "Manual of Civil Service Rules and Regulations".



The Baytown, Saginaw, Santa Monica, and Wichita pamphlets set forth the personnel rules as adopted by the council. The Milwaukee pamphlet, on the other hand, presents in question-and-answer style information on working conditions and employer-employee relationships. The Pasadena 20-page manual opens with a letter from the manager to new employees. This is followed with a simple explanation of personnel policies and several pages about the city government. Every employee of the city received a copy by mail at his home address.

A typical personnel manual is the 29-page booklet "You and Your City Job" issued early in 1948 by the personnel department of Cincinnati, Ohio. The first part of the manual contains a question-and-answer section on "Things You Will Want to Know As a City Employee", "Your Duties and Responsibilities as a City Employee", "Opportunities in City Employment", and a brief history of the city. A major portion of the manual is devoted to "Things You Will Want to Know" under which are discussed personnel rules and procedures applying to: employee classes and hiring procedure, when and how employees are paid, salary and classification plan, hours of work, overtime, tardiness, holidays, vacations, jury duty and subpoenas, sick leaves, leaves of absence, workmen's compensation, in-service training, promotion, transfers, discipline, grievance procedure, employee's suggestion system, outside employment, residence requirements, political activity, lay-offs, resignation, and retirement. The manual also contains facts about employee welfare such as hospital and surgical care, credit unions, savings bonds, personal and financial troubles, and union affiliation and activity.

Personnel manuals contain the kinds of information the employee wants to know when he starts work with the city. They show how employees can get ahead on the job, what is expected of them, and emphasize that employment with the city is a cooperative venture with both the city and the employees contributing. These manuals should be attractive and easy to read and use. A table of contents is desirable even though the pamphlet may be only 20 pages in length.

Another type of personnel publication is the 12-page leaflet entitled "Job Dividends for the Employees of Marquette, Michigan" which was designed to inform city employees of the advantages of working for the city. Printed in two colors the leaflet presents, in short sentences and carefully drawn caricatures and graphs, facts showing the average yearly earnings of city employees, what the employee receives in extra benefits, the cost of paid sick leave, and similar information for retirement, vacations, and holidays.

General Employee Handbooks. A few cities issue a handbook which is intended to convey information to employees, such as a sketch of the city's growth since it was founded, facts about the city government, job information, an explanation of the structure and functions of various departments. Chief emphasis is placed on working conditions and personnel policies and the handbook is distributed to all employees when first issued and to new employees when they are hired. A typical handbook is a 50-page manual issued in 1943 by the city of Kalamazoo, Mich., entitled "Better Public Service". This handbook, prepared by the employees and edited by the city's research bureau, was designed to acquaint city employees with the work of all departments with special emphasis on how each employee's job fits into the municipal government as a whole.

The Kalamazoo handbook contains both general and departmental organization charts and reports the location and function of each department or bureau and distinguishes between the services the city can and cannot perform. The preface of the handbook states: "Better public relations can be maintained by an alert body of employees fully informed as to their own duties, aware of the

(OVER)



position of their units in the general scheme, and what is equally important, a good working knowledge of the functions of all other departments and the names of the persons in responsible charge."

The Kalamazoo handbook, according to the city manager, has helped to build a better spirit of public service among employees. The trend in most cities, however, has been toward special bulletins and manuals instead of attempting to cover all points in one handbook. For example, personnel rules and working conditions are covered in one manual or booklet, driving practices and care of equipment may be covered in a booklet for equipment drivers, current news of interest to employees in a special newsletter or employees' magazine, etc. A larger city may have a special booklet or leaflet for new employees and special manuals for particular jobs as in the police and fire fields.

Newsletters and Other Periodicals. Special newsletters or bulletins in some cities keep city employees regularly and continuously informed on matters of direct interest to them. These newsletters generally are mimeographed and consist of one or two pages. Those issued by Pontiac, Mich., and Midland, Tex., for example, are designed specifically for employees. The Pontiac "Newsletter" is published by the personnel department and distributed to all city employees. The first issue, released in October, 1948, consisted of one sheet mimeographed on both sides with one-half page devoted to an explanation of a recent pay increase and one-half page to proposed personnel rules. The newsletter explained, for example, that the new rules were being prepared with the help of representatives of employee organizations. The Newsletter also announced the time of the weekly radio program on municipal affairs and invited employees to listen in. It also announced that the Newsletter would be issued from time to time as interest and news demanded and invited employees to submit ideas on items that should be covered.

In Midland, the city manager publishes each month a one-page mimeographed newsletter which goes to each of the 108 city employees and also to civic organizations and interested citizens. In the first issue the manager explained that the object of the bulletin was to familiarize all employees with the operations of city departments and what the city as a whole is accomplishing. In each issue the manager covers the highlights of municipal expenditures in relation to the budget and discusses subjects of timely interest such as vacations, public relations, inflation, parking meters, etc.

Several other cities issue newsletters containing news of general interest to the city council and citizens as well as to inform employees about current city activities. In Abilene, Tex., for example, a monthly two-page bulletin, "Your City", summarizes current activities and discusses the work of various departments. In Kansas City, Mo., the "City Manager's News Bulletin" is a one or two-page weekly bulletin used to inform the council and other officials about the highlights of city activities. In Richmond, Calif., the manager issues to department heads and employees special bulletins on important administrative matters, these reports varying from one to twelve pages in length. Sometimes they contain an exchange of letters on important questions.

Newsletters designed specifically for employees generally are preferable to those designed for too many groups, i.e. the council, citizens, and employees. The reason for this is that publications are more likely to be read if they are planned for a specific purpose and for a specific group. Employees are citizens but as employees they have need for special types of information which generally would not be of interest to the council and the citizens. For further discussion of this problem see MIS report No. 43 "Using Special Leaflets in Public



Reporting" (October, 1947), and MIS report No. 56 "Methods of Reporting to the Council" (September, 1948).

A few cities issue periodicals that are more pretentious than a mimeographed newsletter. A notable example is the "Municipal Journal" published monthly by the department of commerce of Rochester, New York. Such periodicals are of course financed by the city and the work of preparing news items is done by city employees.

The trend in employee publications is toward more informational material and less gossip and personals. Pictures of employees should be on-the-job, not on the bathing beach. The function of the periodical should be to interpret the city government in ways that are read, understood, and believed by the employee. Employees want to know more about the city government for which they work. While it is true that an employee likes to see his own name or his baby's picture in print, many publications go to an extreme with such material. He is more concerned with the security of his job and the factors about the city that help make that job secure. If the publication issued by the city government for employees does not report activities of employee groups, the latter may want to issue their own periodical.

Employee Organizations. The growth in employee organizations presages greater participation by employees in determining personnel policies and conditions of employment. The result should be greater employee understanding and support of policy arrived at through negotiation. Employee organizations also provide through their publications and meetings a method of informing employees on municipal problems and provide a medium for two-way communications between employees and management. An example of such an organization is the employees' council established by Wichita, Kan., in 1943. This council has enabled employees to participate in solving personnel problems and thus in improving employer-employee relations.

The employees' council in Wichita selects one of the five members of the personnel advisory board of the city. This board investigates and reports on employees' complaints of discrimination or unfair treatment and on request advises the personnel director on personnel problems and policies. The 20 members of the employees council are selected annually by the city employees. The council holds regular monthly meetings during office hours. This employees' council is primarily a device through which management conveys over-all policies to the employees and receives expressions of group opinions. Such a council also administers social functions in which all the employees participate. It is not an organization for collective bargaining or for handling grievances.

An employees' organization may assist the city's personnel department in developing a personnel manual and when it is finished the group may sponsor an employee meeting at which the manual can be formally presented and explained with each employee receiving a copy. In Wichita the employee's council member on the advisory board reports back to the employees through the council on the deliberations of the board. This organization has been useful in keeping employees informed because the city manager explains to meetings of the employee's council the various problems of the city with the result there is a better mutual understanding of city problems. In Pontiac, Mich., where there are several employee organizations a representative from each group sat on a committee to assist in the preparation of personnel rules. This committee discussed the proposed rules and considered various suggested changes.

(OVER)



Employee Publications. Employee organizations in some cities issue a magazine or other regular periodical, as in Alameda, Baltimore, Pasadena, Los Angeles, and Wichita. Most of these employee publications are profusely illustrated with pictures of employees and carry short news items about what individual employees are doing, mostly personal items. In Alameda "The Ace News" is a four-page mimeographed monthly bulletin that contains personal items about employees, short quips about municipal activities, and pencil caricatures and sketches. A typical issue of the Wichita "City Employee Bulletin" carries a page signed by the city manager under the heading of "Let's Talk It Over", names of new employees, numerous sketches and caricatures as well as news about the credit union, activities of employees, and an occasional crossword puzzle.

Management should encourage the employee organization or groups, if more than one, to issue a periodical of some type. Perhaps the city can provide the equipment for publishing the material. Space may be provided for the city manager's comments on a current problem. The contents should be well-balanced and not given over entirely to "personals". Coverage may well include new appointments, promotions, resignations, etc, and notice and comment may be given to such matters as visitors and what they wanted or said, publications issued by the city, conferences attended by city officials, changes in personnel rules, summary of city council actions, activities of credit unions and of employee groups, news about city finances, etc.

Bulletin Boards. Most cities have bulletin boards inside the front entrance of the city hall in the smaller cities and in the various departments in the larger city halls. A bulletin board is an effective means of keeping employees informed but it is essential that some individual be charged with responsibility for posting and removing material. Material that goes on the board should include new rules or changes in rules and regulations affecting employees, announcements of promotional examinations, announcements of employee activities, and other material as may be indicated in a memo from the chief administrator's office.

Attention of employees can be attracted to important announcements through a poster or drawing of some type which can be put on the bulletin board. A bulletin board must have color, variety, and human interest to attract attention. The boards must be clean and neat and the material changed at regular intervals or as soon as it is out of date. The departmental board should be located near but not in areas of congestion. The general board in the city hall lobby probably should be glass enclosed and locked.

Contests and Suggestion Systems. A carefully planned contest in connection with a particular project is useful in stimulating employees to think about the problems of the city or of their particular department. Among the cities that have sponsored contests in recent years is Detroit. The mayor set up an employees award board which pays employees for usable suggestions on how to improve the city government. In the latest contest which closes in July, 1949, the city has offered to make awards of \$25 to \$250 each for the 10 best suggestions.

A suggestion system must be carefully worked out in advance as to details of procedure and awards to be made. The awards should be specific as to amount, if cash is given, or as to time off or any other recognition. Every employee should receive material announcing the system which might be handled by a city employees' suggestion committee under the personnel department. Instructions should indicate what types of suggestions are desired, how to submit a suggestion, what happens to the suggestion, and what the employee gets out of it. The purpose of the system should also be carefully explained.



Employee Meetings. It is seldom possible for cities with hundreds of employees to have a general meeting of all employees. Such meetings are not generally desirable but, depending upon the number of employees, can be held at an auditorium. A meeting of all employees, for example, may be desirable in explaining a new retirement system or a new pay plan. Some cities sponsor an annual dinner at which employees are awarded service buttons or pins, the employees receiving awards being guests of the city. The mayor and members of the council should be present and city employees and representatives of citizens' groups invited to attend. Group meetings of new employees in connection with orientation training may be desirable, and occasional dinner meetings for department heads and other administrative personnel.

Administrative Regulations. The city manager of Kansas City, Mo., periodically issues administrative regulations as a means of keeping departmental heads and employees informed. The regulations are divided into seven classes: (1) general, (2) personnel matters and payroll procedures, (3) financial and purchasing, (4) legal and legislative, (5) use of city buildings and property, (6) use of motor vehicles on city business, and (7) accidents involving city employees and property. All administrative employees must become familiar with the subject matter of the regulations. Examples of topics covered are: letters from councilmen, appointment procedures, employees' surety bonds, overtime and compensatory time, emergency purchases, leasing of city property, requests for ordinances, eating of food in city offices, use of private cars on city business, reporting of motor vehicle accidents, regulations covering compensation, and injuries and deaths in line of duty.

Radio and Newspapers. Cities generally can secure free radio time each week for broadcasting information about municipal affairs. City employees may be informed in advance of such programs. In Milwaukee, for example, where several radio programs are sponsored each week by the city, the city has issued an attractive card notice indicating the nature of each program and the time. Regular and special releases to local newspapers also may be of interest to employees, especially if names of individuals are included. The city also should prepare releases on awards and other recognition given to employees for long terms of service or the completion of a specific job, etc.

Letters, Reports, and Movies. Personal letters sent to employees often are an effective means of communicating a special message. These letters should be sent to the employee's home where they may be read at leisure and the contents discussed with members of the family. Letters will be used only on rare occasions because the city administrator generally deals with employees through department heads.

A copy of the annual municipal report and certain other special reports prepared for citizens may well be sent to every employee, supplemented perhaps with a brief letter from the city manager or the head of the department in which the employee works. A better method is a brief annual report especially prepared for city employees. Such a report could tell what the employees accomplished and explain and interpret city operations from the employee point of view.

Motion pictures or slide films can be used to explain or instruct employees in techniques of the job, or of a new municipal activity, or on how the retirement system works, and also in training employees in public relations, in safety on the job, in how to supervise other employees, etc.

Note: Officials of cities subscribing to MIS may obtain on request loan copies of personnel manuals, newsletters, employee periodicals, and also information on setting up suggestion systems and obtaining movies for use in training employees.



